

13 June 2012
11:18 AM

C-II\Story and Lessons

Lessons:

1. Though both Kennedy and Khrushchev were not only reasonable, sane, but prudent—although

neither wanted to take what they saw as even moderate risks of nuclear war

(or of any conflict, which each saw as involving more than small risks of escalating greatly, even to nuclear war);

and indeed each was determined to avert nuclear war

(which each believed he could almost surely do by sufficient last-minute concession, which he was willing to make);

and each rejected proposals by advisors, especially their military, that they judged (realistically) would have involved risks higher than they wanted to take, though offering higher chances of success;

--despite their mutual desire, intention and expectation of avoiding nuclear war, a nuclear war might well have resulted from their joint actions. The danger was greater than they probably would have been willing to accept if they had foreseen it or known it during the crisis. (Part of that danger was that each, especially Kennedy, had influential members of their government or polity who either grossly underestimated certain risks or urged, insanely, to accept them.)

"In reality" (as might be judged by an observer who knew at the time all the facts on both sides that we know now) the overall risks of all-out thermonuclear war *were significantly high*, at least "moderate" (i.e., much greater than either of them would have been consciously willing to undergo: perhaps 10% to 30%) and at certain moments, much higher than that.

2. In other words, each underestimated the overall risks (for the world!) he was incurring with his overall strategy, at the outset and throughout.

Each was unaware at various moments of incidents that greatly increased those risks.

Each overestimated (especially at the outset) his ability to control events, including actions of his own forces.

All this despite the fact that they each were especially conscious of and sensitive to the need to control risk, not to take excessive risk, and concerned to avoid an explosion into war (to a far greater degree than some of their advisors, including military).

3. Each made claims of their commitment and their intentions—in public and to their adversaries which went beyond what they were willing or intended to do. In other words, they were bluffing.

Kennedy even did this with respect to the ExComm and the JCS. K seems to have had less need to do this to the Presidium than Kennedy to the ExComm or the public; he was more of a dictator (as Sergo Mikoyan puts it) with little need to explain or excuse or apologize to his advisors (or to his public, which knew little of the crisis while it was going on).

Later American scholars and journalists have often taken these JFK bluffs at face value, largely in ignorance of data which became available only much later.

4. But despite all the above, each did take what they saw as small risks of conflict, even of thermonuclear war. They underestimated these, partly by misreading or underestimating the reaction of their opponent, partly by exaggerating their own ability to control their own forces and allies. The result was a higher overall risk of war than they were aware of at the time or had intended to incur.

This risk was not as high as many outsiders (e.g. Leo Szilard and Bertrand Russell) believed at the time or later—a high probability of global catastrophe--based on taking the rhetorical public statements of both at face value (or being unaware of the extreme strategic inferiority of the SU and its resulting prudence: i.e. Khrushchev's extreme reluctance to launch a first strike).

It was not as high as it might have been with other leaders, or with different but “possible” choices by the leaders: e.g., if either, especially Kennedy, had acted on the advice of his military or more hawkish civilian advisors (near-certainty of global catastrophe).

Yet it was definitely not the “negligible” or “near zero probability-- one in a thousand or less—that some hawks judged at the time (Dillon’s claim; but even I and Harry Rowen were—wrongly, as I now see-- in the 1/100 to 1/1000 range, based on Soviet strategic weakness) or as some scholar-participants like McGeorge Bundy later judged, reflecting his knowledge of Kennedy’s reluctance to attack or invade and willingness to make concessions (and perhaps inferring the same for Khrushchev: in other words, the points made in (1) above).

Nitze's 10%, or twice that, may have been about right, or reasonable, with all facts known (which he didn't). Nitze may have thought that acceptable. I thought that insane at the time (mistakenly thinking it was actually much lower): and that, without knowing about nuclear winter.

5. It was, I now believe, insane for either of these men to be taking what they saw as "small" risks of TN war. (Smaller, in their minds, I believe, than Nitze did). That is true given what they knew of nuclear war at the time; it is magnified, obviously, by what became known about nuclear winter (which would have resulted from the US SIOP-62 at the time, and which was joined by comparable capabilities in the SU in the mid-Sixties).

And it is further magnified by their (almost inevitable) underestimation of the risks they were actually taking—imposed on all of humanity! And on all future generations, whose existence they were making much less than certain—in their actions which they well realized incurred the possibility of armed conflict between nuclear-armed states.

Yet they were joined in this Cold War/nuclear age insanity—reproduced frequently, and to some extent continuously, ever since then, even since the end of the Cold War twenty years ago—by the officials and much of the populations not only of the US (and Cuba and the Soviet Union) but of all the NATO nations. The European populations allowed--with little opposition (except for Germany in the early -80's, or England earlier)-- their leaders to run these risks rather than either to challenge the Cold War framework (and division of Germany and Europe) and military spending, or to spend enough on conventional defense to feel secure. A devil's bargain, with their childrens' lives (and all their lives: and the future of humanity) at stake.

Hideous, monstrous nuclear age policies were "rationalized" and "justified" by the Cold War (whose origins and issues were distorted propagandistically) yet have largely persisted since the end of the Cold War (which was never the sole driver of the policies). (Persisted except for reduced numbers of warheads, which remain far greater than is necessary to produce nuclear winter, an "undesired, unintended, but inevitable collateral damage" effect of large-scale nuclear attacks.)

6. It was two unusually intelligent, sober and reasonable heads of state—not crazy or aberrant "rogues" or "terrorists"--who consciously set military deployments and actions in motion that had the potential—actually realized in a number of instances—of creating incidents which in turn had a high potential for ending life on earth.

7. Each made—despite enormous intelligence apparatuses and technical surveillance operations—major miscalculations with respect to each other, which greatly magnified the risks they were running. (Or in some instances, reduced the actual risk).

These miscalculations could not be understood (or corrected) by outsiders, since they were not the ones implied by the public declarations of either. Nor did they all leave a paper trail, in documents or memoirs, apparent to historians. On the other hand, some alleged miscalculations attributed to their adversary (“K thought we had plans for invading Cuba!”) were not miscalculations at all: the claim is just a lie, a cover story.

Ironically, it was Kennedy’s ignorance of certain realities in Cuba--the limits of Khrushchev’s control there, and the presence of nuclear warheads both for MRBMs and for tactical nuclear missiles, both of which Khrushchev chose to keep secret--that led to Khrushchev’s “defeat” and Kennedy’s “victory. However, it took fast action by Khrushchev with no time to spare to prevent Kennedy’s ignorance of these factors from ending, instead, in regional and probably global disaster.

8. [Perhaps my major finding]: It was K’s recognition of *his lack of control* over his own forces and Castro’s—accompanied by his knowledge that Kennedy was unaware of this lack, which K had lied about and which he had neither time nor inclination to enlighten Kennedy about—along with K’s knowledge (unshared with or by Kennedy) that *he had vastly increased the dangers of an invasion by deploying tactical nuclear weapons to Cuba*—which virtually forced, at any rate induced, K to concede to withdraw his missiles from Cuba hastily, with no more than a contingent no-invasion pledge from Kennedy.

These were the proximate factors that led to the actual resolution of the crisis, which otherwise could have and indeed was likely to have ended quite differently, either with a victory by Khrushchev or by an explosion. *Neither* of them has ever been given appropriate credit, or usually, any role at all, in explaining Khrushchev’s decision by historians, even since 1992 when these elements had become known.

9. To the extent that a non-violent resolution and in particular an American victory is to be celebrated¹, the basis for it and the dangers it involved—the war it might have been and almost was--have been little understood in the last half century. The reality is that events **were** escaping control by either leadership. Incidents were occurring beyond the control and in some cases

¹ The latter is problematic, given the effects on Khrushchev’s replacement by a successor who encouraged a military nuclear buildup, and on the endorsement of American nuclear “superiority” to be pursued indefinitely, and a mistaken notion of the efficacy of “graduated military coercion” in Vietnam.

the knowledge of the leaders, both of them, each one of which could have escalated to a localized nuclear war and beyond that to the ultimate multi-Holocaust.

If the crisis had ended instead with a “peaceful” Khrushchev victory on Sunday, October 28 (which it might well have done if Khrushchev could have assured himself that he had Castro’s gunners under control), it might well have been followed by a confrontation over Berlin that would involve similar risks and incidents of loss of control, even more ominously.

Khrushchev didn’t explicitly rely on his potential loss of control over his MRBMs if they were under attack as a deterrent against attack on them; on the contrary, he denied it, emphasizing in his letter of October 27 that they were exclusively under the command of Soviet officers, so there was no need to worry: “any accidental use of them whatsoever to the detriment of the United States of America is excluded...Therefore, if there is no invasion of Cuba...then, of course, these means do not threaten anyone and will not threaten.” (*Thirteen Days*, 168) That implicitly threatened that Moscow might order them to be launched if Cuba were invaded; but that could well be doubted—as the JCS explicitly did doubt it—since it would be suicidal for the Kremlin leaders.

The danger that did deter McNamara and Kennedy from attacking the missiles was the possibility of an unauthorized firing by a local crew under attack : even if Khrushchev denied the possibility, even if he didn’t worry about it (before the SAM firing on October 26, which he learned about after that letter was sent).

The mere fact that General Sweeney couldn’t guarantee that one, two or five missiles might survive his initial attack, and in McNamara’s eyes that that might mean one American city might be destroyed whether Khrushchev ordered it or not, was enough to take air attack off the table for McNamara (and shortly, for Kennedy), though he didn’t tell the Chiefs that after the first day.

And I would infer that Khrushchev too had that possibility in mind as the deterrent to the Americans, from Sergo Mikoyan’s assertion that Khrushchev was confident that the missiles would not be attacked once they were all operational. (After all, if he were relying on the deterrent effect of his own will to retaliate for an attack on Cuba, he could do that with an ICBM from the Soviet Union as well as with a surviving missile from Cuba, and he could do that even if the Cuban missiles were not yet operational: yet he recognized that the period when they were being installed but not yet operational was a period of particular vulnerability.)

10. The danger to humanity demonstrated in the Crisis but characteristic of the entire Cold War was that both sides were making apocalyptic threats for limited (and in their eyes, defensive) goals; and although these threats were bluffs in the minds of the respective leaders, not intended to be carried out if ultimately defied, each took various actions to make them credible and effective which had risks of leading to armed conflict, thinking they could control escalation and almost certainly avert the ultimate catastrophe they were invoking as a threat.

And so they did, in this case. Yet it demonstrates that the likelihood of incidents that could have escalated was greater than they expected or ever knew; and it seems likely that they grossly overestimated the reliability of their control if armed conflict (beyond the single shoot-down and casualty) had occurred. There was a large element of luck in the fact that their joint policies did not end in the destruction of humanity. All things considered, survival was not only not guaranteed, it was not nearly certain, or even close to it.

It seems to follow that neither they, nor any that came before or have come after them, should have been taking such gambles, or should have had the capability, or had any right to do so.

In a Note at the end of Robert Kennedy's memoir of the crisis, his editor Theodore Sorensen wrote: "It was Senator Kennedy's intention to add a discussion of the basic ethical question involved: what, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"

Robert Kennedy died before he could complete the memoir: and without knowing *most* of the acute nuclear dangers of the crisis. But even without knowing those, only one answer seems morally sound: *no* circumstance involved in this crisis gave either government that right, to do what it did; and *no circumstances that have ever actually existed* have justified raising and maintaining that shadow, which has hung over the earth continuously for sixty years.

Thursday, June 14, 12

What should we learn, from the behavior and attitudes of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev—and their governments—in the Cuban Missile Crisis about the possible (or likely, or unlikely) performance of current and future heads of nuclear superpowers who were each faced with the imminent prospect of a very considerable humiliation or failure that might be averted by some combination of military threats or (dangerous) actions and (politically costly) concessions? (That pretty well defines a political/military “crisis”; although the policy failure or humiliation feared by the leadership is likely to be described by at least one side to its own public and the world as a threat to its “national security.”)

(The circumstances of the Cuban Crisis have a remarkable number of similarities to the rolling crises of “dealing” with the Iranian nuclear energy (and possible weapons) program ever since 2006. Big difference: neither Russia nor any other nuclear weapons state is our adversary in this case.)

Let’s suppose leaders who we might judge were neither much better nor much worse in their values and judgments and competence than these two historical figures. If they were more or less like Kennedy and Khrushchev, what might we expect them to do, what would they probably not do, and how might it come out? And what kind of advice or pressure might they be receiving, for alternative actions?

Here is the example that these two “better-than-ordinary” leaders (who were definitely wiser and more prudent than many of their advisors, their military, or in Kennedy’s case, some leaders in both parties in Congress) actually set:

- 1) They were each *willing* to take some small risk (as they judged it) of blowing “the world” up, to avoid their humiliation or policy setback.

(That would not be immediately relevant to future crises that were not between the US and Russia. But the risk of blowing the world up still exists, continuously, as a result of maintaining two Doomsday Machines on hair-trigger alert, subject to false alarms. And that risk—very small but not zero on any particular day—would be increased in any crisis involving the two superpowers even indirectly, especially if a nuclear weapon should go off. The benefits of maintaining this joint posture are minuscule, either in domestic or external terms, but are evidently sufficient to allow both leaderships to incur the small, continuous (and cumulative) risk of global cataclysm: as suggested by this proposition (1).

- 2) They were not willing to take actions that involved what they saw as a large or even moderate risk of that. But they underestimated the real risk (let's say, what they would have estimated the odds to be if they had each known what the other knew, or what their respective military forces were actually doing). They took actions more dangerous than they knew, more dangerous than they would have been willing to undertake if they had been better informed or had made better estimates of the other.
- 3) They were cautious about ordering or permitting military threats to be carried out to the point of overt violence, actually killing opposing troops or civilians, each being aware that events could quickly get out of their control as pressures on them from advisors, their own military, and their publics to retaliate and escalate would quickly increase and could be insurmountable (since backing down from overt threats of violence, in the face of actual violence, would pose the risk of humiliation to the leader even greater than threatened originally).
- 4) But despite this caution, they would take actions that made the onset of violence possible and proximate; they consciously "marginally increased" risks that this process of escalation might get started without their having chosen it—by actions beyond their control, of their own forces or allies or those of the opponent.
- 5) In hopes of saving face and achieving better terms in a non-violent settlement, they each persisted—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—in acting *as if* they intended to carry out their utmost threats, if necessary to achieve their declared aims. Each day of this was a day in which incidents occurred that might have triggered uncontrollable escalation.
- 6) Thus--despite their real abhorrence of nuclear war and their caution about actually beginning (as distinct from threatening and preparing) conventional conflict--they did **not** "take every possible action" to *minimize* or to eliminate the imminent danger of all-out thermonuclear war, either early in the crisis process or as it proceeded. Doing everything "possible" to that end would include making early concessions in order to settle, and avoiding apocalyptic rhetoric about the issues that mad concessions more costly and slowed down their offer.
- 7) Instead, each *used* the threat of conventional conflict and even nuclear war to defend his own domestic and international prestige and influence, consciously raising the risk (even more than they appreciated) that conflict and the destruction of humanity (to which both alluded more than once, as the possible result of their opponent's (and their own) unwillingness to concede, to do what was being demanded.

All-out thermonuclear war (and nuclear winter) really was a significant possibility during the Crisis.

This despite the fact that each leader (unlike many of their military and civilian advisors) *was ready in his own mind to concede to the other's demand rather than to go to war*. In fact, after their initial reactions (when Kennedy took a surprise attack seriously, and Khrushchev a week later considered ordering his ships to run the blockade, each for perhaps a day) I believe that each secretly (from most of his own advisors) *intended* to make that concession at the moment when the outbreak of two-sided war in the Caribbean seemed otherwise imminent.

But not before that moment. Each preferred to wait another day, and a day after that, in hopes that it would not be necessary, that the other would concede before he had to.

And meanwhile, recon planes were flying over Cuban defenses, Soviet submarines with nuclear torpedoes were operating in the proscribed zone and American destroyers were dropping "small" depth charges to force them to surface, American bombers were on hair-trigger alert and a false alarm actually occurred (and was fortunately discounted), a U-2 entered Soviet airspace and opposing fighter-planes were launched (the Americans with nuclear weapons).

Each leader consciously directed military actions that made an "accidental, inadvertent" nuclear war more likely than it had been two weeks earlier. Nuclear war in the next week or two was a real possibility. And if it had come, it would not have been because either leader had wanted it, or failed to appreciate that it would be catastrophic (though they didn't know, scientifically, that the reality would match their rhetoric), or had desired to provoke it. (Nor would they be likely to know, in the moments before they died, in any detail just how it had started, what cascade of events had made it unavoidable: any more than the leaders of Europe knew exactly how World War I had exploded.) Yet it would have resulted from deliberate directives, on the whole carried out efficiently, that predictably entailed such risks.

Saturday, June 16, 12

[Humiliation in the crisis: actions undertaken to repair injured self-esteem and political image after a humiliation (violence; radical; surprising; deceptive?) risk-taking; inclination to inflict humiliation on the aggressor, revenge (restoration of dignity, parity, indicate balance of power).

Each had recently humiliated the other; and in turn, the other set out to humiliate reciprocally. Though JFK talked about his concern to avoid humiliating an opponent: he deliberately did so, with blockade; K had to back down from his initial instinct to defy it, and his claims that he would do so; showing superior US power in Caribbean (and SU lack of sufficient superiority elsewhere, despite conventional balance or superiority, considering the humiliating difference in strategic capability).

(Yet each was prepared to accept humiliation, even risk job, rather than accept imminent nuclear war. (Just to prolong blockade on Monday would have been a great back-down for JFK in front of the JCS and ExComm. As it was, it may have cost him his life.) But each was waiting until the last moment, despite ongoing risk. Chicken. (See us on tracks: COULD the train stop in time, even if they meant to? Compare Brian Willson).

(See my troops on Vieques, setting a wire at neck height: like K's sending tac nucs and not announcing them. (The real issue wasn't whether he had delegated authority in the end or not.)

A public trade was going to be a major humiliation for JFK, even if suggested by U Thant. (It wasn't what he indicated on Oct. 22). Parity... Warnings (gravest issues: "we'll have to trade our missiles in Turkey if you do that! And give up our plans to invade!")

Need to even the score on humiliation: K on missiles in turkey (and Gilpatric, and talk of FS—more me!); JFK, on K's F.MA (even worse if it had been a FA!): both had an emotional instinct to make the other look like a fool and coward and blowhard and weakling. (But NOT a desire to go so far as to kill his troops...) Revenge.

See Blema S. Steinberg, "Shame and Humiliation in the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Psychoanalytic Perspective," Political Psychology, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1991, 653-690. [before Havana Conference: refers to Moscow conference, 1989. Havana: tac nucs? Originally presented 1989.

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And I would infer that Khrushchev too had that possibility in mind as the deterrent to the Americans, from Sergo Mikoyan’s assertion that Khrushchev was confident that the missiles would not be attacked once they were all operational. (After all, if he were relying on the deterrent effect of his own will to retaliate for an attack on Cuba, he could do that with an ICBM from the Soviet Union as well as with a surviving missile from Cuba, and he could do that even if the Cuban missiles were not yet operational: yet he recognized that the period when they were being installed but not yet operational was a period of particular vulnerability.)

10. The danger to humanity demonstrated in the Crisis but characteristic of the entire Cold War was that both sides were making apocalyptic threats for limited (and in their eyes, defensive) goals; and although these threats were bluffs in the minds of the respective leaders, not intended to be carried out if ultimately defied, each took various actions to make them credible and effective which had risks of leading to armed conflict, thinking they could control escalation and almost certainly avert the ultimate catastrophe they were invoking as a threat.

And so they did, in this case. Yet it demonstrates that the likelihood of incidents that could have escalated was greater than they expected or ever knew; and it seems likely that they grossly overestimated the reliability of their control if armed conflict (beyond the single shoot-down and casualty) had occurred. There was a large element of luck in the fact that their joint policies did not end in the destruction of humanity. All things considered, survival was not only not guaranteed, it was not nearly certain, or even close to it.

It seems to follow that neither they, nor any that came before or have come after them, should have been taking such gambles, or should have had the capability, or had any right to do so.

In a Note at the end of Robert Kennedy's memoir of the crisis, his editor Theodore Sorensen wrote: "It was Senator Kennedy's intention to add a discussion of the basic ethical question involved: what, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"

Robert Kennedy died before he could complete the memoir: and without knowing *most* of the acute nuclear dangers of the crisis. But even without knowing those, only one answer seems morally sound: *no* circumstance involved in this crisis gave either government that right, to do what it did; and *no circumstances that have ever actually existed* have justified raising and maintaining that shadow, which has hung over the earth continuously for sixty years.

Thursday, June 14, 12

What should we learn, from the behavior and attitudes of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev—and their governments—in the Cuban Missile Crisis about the possible (or likely, or unlikely) performance of current and future heads of nuclear superpowers who were each faced with the imminent prospect of a very considerable humiliation or failure that might be averted by some combination of military threats or (dangerous) actions and (politically costly) concessions? (That pretty well defines a political/military “crisis”; although the policy failure or humiliation feared by the leadership is likely to be described by at least one side to its own public and the world as a threat to its “national security.”)

(The circumstances of the Cuban Crisis have a remarkable number of similarities to the rolling crises of “dealing” with the Iranian nuclear energy (and possible weapons) program ever since 2006. Big difference: neither Russia nor any other nuclear weapons state is our adversary in this case.)

Let's suppose leaders who we might judge were neither much better nor much worse in their values and judgments and competence than these two historical figures. If they were more or less like Kennedy and Khrushchev, what might we expect them to do, what would they probably not do, and how might it come out? And what kind of advice or pressure might they be receiving, for alternative actions?

Here is the example that these two “better-than-ordinary” leaders (who were definitely wiser and more prudent than many of their advisors, their military, or in Kennedy's case, some leaders in both parties in Congress) actually set:

- 1) They were each *willing* to take some small risk (as they judged it) of blowing “the world” up, to avoid their humiliation or policy setback.

(That would not be immediately relevant to future crises that were not between the US and Russia. But the risk of blowing the world up still exists, continuously, as a result of maintaining two Doomsday Machines on hair-trigger alert, subject to false alarms. And that risk—very small but not zero on any particular day—would be increased in any crisis involving the two superpowers even indirectly, especially if a nuclear weapon should go off. The benefits of maintaining this joint posture are minuscule, either in domestic or external terms, but are evidently sufficient to allow both leaderships to incur the small, continuous (and cumulative) risk of global cataclysm: as suggested by this proposition (1).

- 2) They were not willing to take actions that involved what they saw as a large or even moderate risk of that. But they underestimated the real risk (let's say, what they would have estimated the odds to be if they had each known what the other knew, or what their respective military forces were actually doing). They took actions more dangerous than they knew, more dangerous than they would have been willing to undertake if they had been better informed or had made better estimates of the other.
- 3) They were cautious about ordering or permitting military threats to be carried out to the point of overt violence, actually killing opposing troops or civilians, each being aware that events could quickly get out of their control as pressures on them from advisors, their own military, and their publics to retaliate and escalate would quickly increase and could be insurmountable (since backing down from overt threats of violence, in the face of actual violence, would pose the risk of humiliation to the leader even greater than threatened originally).
- 4) But despite this caution, they would take actions that made the onset of violence possible and proximate; they consciously "marginally increased" risks that this process of escalation might get started without their having chosen it—by actions beyond their control, of their own forces or allies or those of the opponent.
- 5) In hopes of saving face and achieving better terms in a non-violent settlement, they each persisted—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—in acting *as if* they intended to carry out their utmost threats, if necessary to achieve their declared aims. Each day of this was a day in which incidents occurred that might have triggered uncontrollable escalation.
- 6) Thus--despite their real abhorrence of nuclear war and their caution about actually beginning (as distinct from threatening and preparing) conventional conflict--they did **not** "take every possible action" to *minimize* or to eliminate the imminent danger of all-out thermonuclear war, either early in the crisis process or as it proceeded. Doing everything "possible" to that end would include making early concessions in order to settle, and avoiding apocalyptic rhetoric about the issues that mad concessions more costly and slowed down their offer.
- 7) Instead, each *used* the threat of conventional conflict and even nuclear war to defend his own domestic and international prestige and influence, consciously raising the risk (even more than they appreciated) that conflict and the destruction of humanity (to which both alluded more than once, as the possible result of their opponent's (and their own) unwillingness to concede, to do what was being demanded.

All-out thermonuclear war (and nuclear winter) really was a significant possibility during the Crisis.

This despite the fact that each leader (unlike many of their military and civilian advisors) *was ready in his own mind to concede to the other's demand rather than to go to war*. In fact, after their initial reactions (when Kennedy took a surprise attack seriously, and Khrushchev a week later considered ordering his ships to run the blockade, each for perhaps a day) I believe that each secretly (from most of his own advisors) *intended* to make that concession at the moment when the outbreak of two-sided war in the Caribbean seemed otherwise imminent.

But not before that moment. Each preferred to wait another day, and a day after that, in hopes that it would not be necessary, that the other would concede before he had to.

And meanwhile, recon planes were flying over Cuban defenses, Soviet submarines with nuclear torpedoes were operating in the proscribed zone and American destroyers were dropping "small" depth charges to force them to surface, American bombers were on hair-trigger alert and a false alarm actually occurred (and was fortunately discounted), a U-2 entered Soviet airspace and opposing fighter-planes were launched (the Americans with nuclear weapons).

Each leader consciously directed military actions that made an "accidental, inadvertent" nuclear war more likely than it had been two weeks earlier. Nuclear war in the next week or two was a real possibility. And if it had come, it would not have been because either leader had wanted it, or failed to appreciate that it would be catastrophic (though they didn't know, scientifically, that the reality would match their rhetoric), or had desired to provoke it. (Nor would they be likely to know, in the moments before they died, in any detail just how it had started, what cascade of events had made it unavoidable: any more than the leaders of Europe knew exactly how World War I had exploded.) Yet it would have resulted from deliberate directives, on the whole carried out efficiently, that predictably entailed such risks.

Saturday, June 16, 12

[Humiliation in the crisis: actions undertaken to repair injured self-esteem and political image after a humiliation (violence; radical; surprising; deceptive?) risk-taking; inclination to inflict humiliation on the aggressor, revenge (restoration of dignity, parity, indicate balance of power).

Each had recently humiliated the other; and in turn, the other set out to humiliate reciprocally. Though JFK talked about his concern to avoid humiliating an opponent: he deliberately did so, with blockade; K had to back down from his initial instinct to defy it, and his claims that he would do so; showing superior US power in Caribbean (and SU lack of sufficient superiority elsewhere, despite conventional balance or superiority, considering the humiliating difference in strategic capability).

(Yet each was prepared to accept humiliation, even risk job, rather than accept imminent nuclear war. (Just to prolong blockade on Monday would have been a great back-down for JFK in front of the JCS and ExComm. As it was, it may have cost him his life.) But each was waiting until the last moment, despite ongoing risk. Chicken. (See us on tracks: COULD the train stop in time, even if they meant to? Compare Brian Willson).

(See my troops on Vieques, setting a wire at neck height: like K's sending tac nucs and not announcing them. (The real issue wasn't whether he had delegated authority in the end or not.)

A public trade was going to be a major humiliation for JFK, even if suggested by U Thant. (It wasn't what he indicated on Oct. 22). Parity... Warnings (gravest issues: "we'll have to trade our missiles in Turkey if you do that! And give up our plans to invade!")

Need to even the score on humiliation: K on missiles in turkey (and Gilpatric, and talk of FS—more me!); JFK, on K's F.MA (even worse if it had been a FA!): both had an emotional instinct to make the other look like a fool and coward and blowhard and weakling. (But NOT a desire to go so far as to kill his troops...) Revenge.

See Blema S. Steinberg, "Shame and Humiliation in the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Psychoanalytic Perspective," Political Psychology, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1991, 653-690. [before Havana Conference: refers to Moscow conference, 1989. Havana: tac nucs? Originally presented 1989.